



# OFFICE of PRIVATE SECTOR

ACADEMIA ENGAGEMENT REPORT (AER)



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## China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) Continues to Abuse U.S. Intellectual Freedom to Advance Its Military Capabilities

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The FBI's Counterintelligence Division, and Boston Field Office, in coordination with the Office of Private Sector (OPS), prepared this AER to inform *the Education Facilities Subsector, specifically U.S. university management and faculty* regarding the People's Republic of China's (PRC) information collection activities against U.S. entities for U.S. intellectual property. The PRC is alleged to have exploited the student exchange program to send its military officials to the United States as students studying abroad. The United States is known for intellectual freedom and welcomes collaboration among researchers and educators from around the globe. The FBI is urging U.S. universities and other academic institutions to remain vigilant of foreign adversaries' ulterior motive(s), as well as, ensure a continual exchange of ideas in an open and transparent environment.

On 28 January 2020, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) charged PRC national Yanqing Ye (Ye), who is currently in China, with visa fraud, making false statements, acting as an agent of a foreign government, and conspiracy. According to DOJ, Ye is a PLA officer who used the student visa program to enter a Boston, Massachusetts-based university on behalf of the PLA. Her entry and attendance at the university allowed her access to U.S. military, scientific research data, and experts' personnel information which she routinely sent to China:<sup>1</sup>



Source: researchgate.net

- To obtain a student visa, Ye made false statements on her visa application by failing to disclose her active military service at the PLA-affiliated National University of Defense Technology (NUDT). The Chinese Scholarship Council, an affiliate of the PRC Ministry of Education, sponsored Ye's studies in the Department of Physics, Chemistry, and Biomedical Engineering.
- During her studies at a Boston-based university, Ye continued to remain in contact with PLA officers in China. Ye continued to fulfill her army duties by conducting research on machine learning and data mining, accessing U.S. military websites that are inaccessible from China and sending U.S. military research documents back to the PRC. Ye also compiled information on two U.S. scientists with expertise in robotics and computer science at the direction of the PLA and provided PLA officers with university account log-in credentials.







- According to court documentations, on 20 April 2019, federal agents interviewed Ye at Boston’s Logan International Airport based on their suspicion of her ongoing work for the PLA. During the interview, she revealed she holds the rank of lieutenant in the PLA and maintained near daily contact with two high-ranking PLA officers at NUDT. A search of Ye’s electronic devices identified taskings from PLA officers and a copy of a research paper on a risk assessment model designed to decipher data for military applications.

This case is part of the PRC’s increased efforts to take advantage of the openness of universities in the United States to strengthen the PRC’s military. Academic institutions can take steps—such as monitoring network activity for abuse and obtaining threat briefings from the FBI—to help minimize the risk to our national security from foreign adversaries.

If you become aware of any misuse of institutional resources that may violate U.S. laws, or if you have any requests or questions, please contact your local FBI Private Sector Coordinator at your nearest FBI Field Office: <https://www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices>.

This Academia Product was disseminated from OPS’s Information Sharing and Analysis Unit. Direct any requests and questions to your FBI Private Sector Coordinator.

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### Endnote

<sup>1</sup> DOJ | Press Release | “Harvard University Professor and Two Chinese Nationals Charged in Three Separate China Related Cases” | <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/harvard-university-professor-and-two-chinese-nationals-charged-three-separate-china-related>